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5-1 11/17/71 Army resorts to spying to occupy its deadheads

WASHINGTON — When Allen Dulles and other veterans of the wartime OSS persuaded President Truman to establish the Central Intelligence Agency, the American people were convinced that they were making a great saving in money and manpower as well as a businesslike stride toward efficiency. How badly they were deceived has now been revealed once again.

But the hue and cry which followed Sen. Sam Ervin's (D-N.C.), revelation that Army intelligence was spying on candidates for office and elected officials is the wrong hue and cry.

Of course it is asinine for the Army to be spying on Adlai Stevenson, but it is so palpably asinine that it is hard to imagine it as heralding a police state. The real danger which Sen. Ervin's revelation points to is something the courtly and venerable North Carolinian did not even mention.

The real danger is that the American Army is so encumbered by unnecessary jobs that it has become the world's most monstrous example of a large investment for a small return.

Never in the history of nations has there been an Army which provided so few fighting soldiers for such vast numbers of uniformed men. Never before has there been an Army which recruited its soldiers with virtual promises that they will be given noncombat jobs.

Army intelligence is only one example of how the Pentagon bureaucracy has thwarted the nation's defense. An intelligence job is a nonfighting job. If you have recruited soldiers on the basis of a promise that they will not have to fight, intelligence is one place to put them. Inevitably, the time will come when intelligence is so vastly overmanned that somebody will suggest spying on political candidates in order to give noncombatant soldiers something to do.

But intelligence is an instructive example because the promise of a central intelligence authority to watch over the nation's defense is of such recent memory. President Truman thought he had done the job, and so did Allen Dulles.

The three services were to conduct battle intelligence. The CIA was to conduct strategic intelligence and to act as the clearinghouse for information gathered by the military.

But within 10 years former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had created the Defense Intelligence Agency and was trying to beat the CIA with reports to President Kennedy.

The new agency grew until it was larger than CIA and produced even more paper. But it did not halt the growth of its subsidiaries. Service intelligence agencies grew, too.

For all this investment — about \$3 billion per year — the nation has received, over the period of the war in Vietnam, an intelligence performance so dismal as to make historical comparison impossible. Information about enemy capability, enemy whereabouts and enemy troop strength has been consistently wrong.

Because it has been consistently wrong, three successive presidents have been made to look foolish, and the American people have been misled by so many victory-around-the-corner statements as to make farce approach tragedy.

The farce is defined in Melvin Laird's marvelously funny order to the Joint Chiefs of Staff last week.

Defense Intelligence, said the secretary of defense, should cease spying upon American civilians, and the unit which had been doing so should be abolished. Then, with the wisdom granted only to those who have seen the defense bureaucracy at firsthand, Laird forbade the Joint Chiefs to set up another such unit in its place.

Tragedy is still waiting to be defined. But surely the possibility of tragedy exists in a defense establishment which requires that for every uniformed man who serves in a division nearly five uniformed men must back him up and that — as the revelations about the Defense Intelligence unit proved — many of these men have literally nothing to do.